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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 002302

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PINR](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: CHOD OZKOK'S ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Robert S. Deutsch for Reasons 1.
4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: The current public investigations of corruption within the Turkish military are unprecedented and apparently the responsibility of one man -- TGS Chief GEN Hilmi Ozkok. Whether his motivation is to retain (or regain) public support for the military, show up an AKP government that is reluctant to go after its own, or simply to do the right thing, the signal is clear that this Chief of Defense, at a minimum, will not tolerate blatant corruption within the military. To see whether this campaign will have lasting effects we may have to wait until after Ozkok retires in August 2006. End Summary.

Military Prosecutors Moving Aggressively and Publicly

2. (U) In November 2004, the Ministry of National Defense (MND) established a hot line to report corruption in military procurement. Within a month, an indictment against 39 persons, including some active duty military officers and MND civilians, was issued alleging irregularities in contracts let between 1994 and 2000 for the construction of a new special forces headquarters complex near Ankara. The indictment implicated two retired four-star generals, former National Security Council SecGen Tuncer Kilinc and former Jandarma Commander Sener Eruygur, for covering up the corrupt practices on this project while they were serving as undersecretary of MND, but the expiration of the statute of limitations prevented their prosecution. Nonetheless, court action was initiated against the contractors and some of the officers who allegedly received bribes for their approval of cost overruns and for additions to the project. Although Eruygur did not have to stand trial on charges related to the special forces headquarters, in mid-February 2004 Turkish General Staff (TGS) Chief General Hilmi Ozkok authorized a probe into other transactions involving Eruygur. (Note: Investigations of four-star officer, whether active duty or retired, must be authorized by the head of TGS. End note.)

3. (U) Meanwhile, Ozkok authorized the military prosecutor to charge previous Navy Commander Ilhami Erdil on charges related to his rigging a competition to award a contract to a company where his daughter was employed. 16 other military personnel were also indicted in this case.

4. (U) On January 5, 2005, one of the contractors on trial in the special forces headquarters case admitted to lending Kilinc \$150,000 in 2002 that had never been repaid. Kilinc claimed the money was a loan to buy a house; he repaid the money to the contractor on January 30. While no charges have been brought against Kilinc, newspapers reported on January 9 that Ozkok ordered a thorough investigation of all procurements to weed out corruption. TGS Deputy Commander General Ilker Basbug told a press conference on January 26 that TGS was determined to fight corruption in a transparent manner. In February, there were numerous press reports that TGS/J4 had been given the responsibility to investigate complaints received through the MND hot line.

Hilmi's Personal Campaign

5. (C) Corruption in the procurement process reportedly is widespread in Turkey, including both civilian officials and military officers. Rumors abound that Air Force Chief General Ibrahim Firtina and others in TAFC received gratuities from the Israelis in exchange for the sole-source contract to upgrade Turkey's F-5s and F-4s. Similar rumors of significant kickbacks circulate about Navy procurements of both on-base construction and vessels. One executive at a local defense firm told us that when personnel from the Land Forces or SSM (the Turkish military procurement agency) are newly assigned to his factory to conduct final inspection and acceptance of new vehicles, there were always delays as the new people waited for the bribes that they had come to expect from previous similar assignments. Only after they become convinced that this company will not pay, does the process start working smoothly again; at least, until the next new inspector arrives.

6. (C) The public investigation, indictment and trial of corruption within the military represented by the special

forces headquarters and the Erdil cases are unprecedented. Such cases in the past, when they occurred, were normally closed to the media. Even more surprising is the implication of retired four-star officers. This special class has for the most part enjoyed a revered existence. A retired general tends to retain the image he had when he retired until they earn a new one, like anti-US "Aksam" columnist Kemal Yavuz and Kilinc who are now deprecated as too partisan.

17. (C) Both civilian and military contacts credit the current crackdown on corruption to General Ozkok. Most of our contacts who know him well describe him as someone committed to doing the right thing. Indeed, there is evidence that Ozkok is committed to cracking down on corruption on a broader scale. In August 2004, Ozkok appointed a three-star general to a long-vacant inspector general position in the TGS. (The unexpected resignation of LTG Karabay after the promotion cycle, however, created a deficit of three stars and, as a result, the IG position again went vacant.)

Why Bother?

18. (C) While we cannot dispute that Ozkok may be interested in doing the right thing, we also recognize that he may have some other motivations for this anti-corruption campaign. One possibility is to bolster the military's public image. One journalist commented to us that the Special Forces headquarters case was just too blatant to ignore, and that Erdil's case was a signal to the Navy to clean up its widely understood corrupt procurement practices. Other contacts have noted that there is growing discontent over the military's abuse of authority and its privileges, including subsidized housing, generous pensions, low or no-interest loans for homes, and (for senior officers) cars and drivers. Public support is important for the military at all times but especially now in its uneasy coexistence with the similarly popular AKP government. AKP has made much of its own anti-corruption drive which has focused mainly on former government officials from other parties. In going after its own, the military has outdone the government in the eyes of the public.

19. (C) A number of our contacts believe Ozkok is determined to weed out the influence of his predecessor, GEN Huseyin Kivrikoglu, who tried to block Ozkok's promotion to CHOD. Kivrikoglu promoted officers who shared his narrow left-nationalist view and who remain rivals to Ozkok and his more Atlanticist approach. Both Kilinc and Eruygur are critics of what they assert is Ozkok's accommodation with AKP. Other hard-liners, such as Firtina, outspoken First Army Commander General Hursit Tolon, and perhaps even Land Forces Commander and Ozkok's presumptive successor General Yasar Buyukanit, may be potential targets. But whether the investigations will expand is an open question. One contact suggested that much will depend on AKP. In her opinion, Ozkok could not do much more unless the civilian authorities follow through on their own investigations. If former ministers are convicted, then the way would be clear to go after other big fish, both civilian and military. If, on the other hand, the former ministers now facing charges walk, then internal opposition to further public investigations would likely be too much for Ozkok to overcome.

Some impact

110. (C) Whatever Ozkok's motivations might be, the investigations appear to be having some impact on military conduct. Turkish Air Force is pursuing a surveillance satellite capability. Initially, TAFC planned to run the program itself and sent out questionnaires to various potential foreign partners. Industry sources heard at the time that Firtina was interested in partnering with South Korea even before his staff began exploring the subject with other governments and companies. However, TAFC's plans suddenly changed late last year and now SSM is handling the procurement. While we cannot say for sure that the increased scrutiny in military procurements that Ozkok has introduced is responsible, we suspect it played a role. At the same time, American defense contractors competing for procurement contracts are reporting increased difficulty in getting appointments with service chiefs, with some citing the appearance of impropriety as an excuse.

111. (C) Whether the current crackdown on corruption within the military will continue is an open question. Ozkok appears committed to it, so we expect it will continue through the rest of his tenure. What happens after August 2006 is anyone's guess.

EDELMAN